Universal Health Coverage
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The goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is to ensure that all people obtain the health services they need without suffering financial hardship when paying for them. This requires a strong, efficient, well-regulated health system for providing the needed services, supported by availability of essential medicines and technologies; and a well-trained and motivated health workforce of sufficient capacity, all being appropriately financed, mainly by the government.
The core strategic priority of the United Nations health agency – the World Health Organization (WHO) in India is:

“promoting access to and utilization of affordable, efficiently networked and sustainable quality services by the entire population, including providing universal health service coverage so that every individual would achieve health gain from a health intervention when needed.”

Universal Health Coverage is, in the words of the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Margaret Chan,

“the single most powerful concept that public health has to offer”

The concept reflects the increasing worldwide attention given to access to health services and reduced impoverishment caused by health spending.

UHC is defined as “ensuring that all people have access to needed promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that people do not suffer financial hardship when paying for these services” (WHO, 2012).
There is no single mix of policy options or set models to achieve Universal Health Coverage and each country has to take its own path based on health needs and health systems capacity.

The three dimensions to be considered for moving towards UHC are:

- Population to be covered
- Services to be provided
- Proportion of health expenditure to be borne by government

A right balance needs to be struck and policy options chosen as to the proportion of the population that will be covered, the range of services that would be included, and the costs that will be covered.
Health financing

Healthcare is getting expensive by the day. Increase in life expectancy and surge in the lifestyle related diseases leads to more people in India needing a variety of health services. Ensuring that every Indian citizen has access to good quality and affordable healthcare will require a stronger health system that assures adequate and skilled health teams providing responsive services at well maintained facilities stocked with the required drugs, diagnostics and equipment. Increasing allocation of funds by the central and state governments and efficient use of available funds by the managers and providers of health services is critical for health system strengthening and achievement of Universal Health Coverage.

The per capita annual public health expenditure is $18 in India, as against $43 in Sri Lanka, $155 in China and $202 in Thailand (all figures in US dollars).
Only 20-25% of India's population is covered under a public/private health insurance scheme.
Health services
Health service provision in India requires a major boost. Though, there is a network of public health facilities in rural areas of the country, majority of providers and facilities are in the urban areas and in the private sector. There is apparent focus on diagnostic and curative services and limited attention on promotive, preventive, and rehabilitative services. The changing pattern of diseases with increasing number of people suffering from combinations of communicable and noncommunicable diseases demands that efforts to increase service provision need to focus on increasing all types (promotive, preventive, diagnostic, curative, rehabilitative and palliative) of health services at various levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) in both, rural and urban areas ensuring continuity of care.

The public sector only provides an estimated 20% of outpatient and 40% of hospitalization services in India.
Access to health services
Improving access to health services, in hard to reach and inaccessible areas such as hilly terrains, and socially disadvantaged groups such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and migratory populations, has to be addressed as a part of achieving Universal Health Coverage. This has been successfully attempted in flood affected districts of Assam and Bihar for providing emergency health services and polio eradication efforts. However, there is need for sustaining and accelerating these efforts and enhancing access to health services on a regular basis.

In 2012, one Primary Health Centre (PHC) catered to about 35,000 people in rural India.
Access to medicines

Despite being the largest supplier of generic medicines and vaccines globally, access to essential medicines is still elusive to a large segment of the Indian population. Recently, the Government of India has brought 348 drugs in the National List of Essential Medicines using the Drug Price Control Order, 2013 thereby fixing the ceiling price of essential medicines. However, purchasing medicines and diagnostics remain the major contributor of out of pocket spending on health in India. A multipronged approach, therefore, is needed to enhance access to medicines including scale up of Jan-Aushadi generic medicines stores, development and implementation of national pharmaceutical policies and streamlining the management of procurement and supply chains in the public sector.

3.9% of India's GDP is spent on health, 60% of which is out of pocket expenditure, most of which is spent on medication.
UHC resources

Fact Sheets
http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/universal_health_coverage/facts/en/

News
http://blogs.plos.org/globalhealth/2014/02/universal-health-pooja/

Q and As on UHC
http://www.who.int/universal_health_coverage/en/
Q and A on UHC and post-2015 Framework
UN résolution on UHC
http://www.who.int/universal_health_coverage/un_resolution/en

Recent articles
The Lancet Series on Universal Health Coverage, 2012
http://www.thelancet.com/themed-universal-health-coverage
The Lancet Series - India towards Universal Health Coverage, 2011
http://www.thelancet.com/series/india-towards-universal-health-coverage

Guidelines/Training Manuals/Training Toolkits
Health System Financing: A way to Universal Health Coverage
Research for Universal Health Coverage

Event/meetings
Director General of WHO's 2013 Convocation Address at the AIIMS
http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2013/convocation_20130912/en/
World Bank Group President on Universal Health Coverage in Emerging Economies

Multimedia
WHO: The many paths towards universal health coverage
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ3sHfYzcv8&feature=youtu.be
WHO: Financing health care
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozcRK688GMs
The Road to Universal Health Coverage
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FjigMG9qTc&feature=youtu.be
We believe in UHC
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebl2aYpufIE

Publications
Best Practices in Universal Health Coverage
http://www.who.int/universal_health_coverage/en/
Report of the High Level Expert Group on Universal health Coverage, Planning Commission of India
http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/rep_uhc0812.pdf
Arguing for universal health coverage:
http://www.who.int/health_financing/UHC_ENvs_BD.PDF

Statistics
World Health Statistics
WHO Global Health Expenditure Atlas
http://www.who.int/entity/nha/atlasfinal.pdf?ua=1

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Thematic Guide: Universal health Coverage
Universal Health Coverage Initiative for India
http://uhc-india.org/
Towards Universal Health Coverage
http://uhcforward.org/
“Universal health care can be the model for the 21st century. It provides access to services, prevents against exclusion and protects people from financial risk. This will bring more than health – it will bring equity, and contribute to a life of dignity for all.”

Ban Ki-moon
UN Secretary-General

“Universal Health Coverage is the most powerful unifying single concept that public health has to offer, because you can realize the dream and the aspiration of health for every person irrespective of what class you belong to, whether you are a woman, or whether you are poor.”

Dr Margaret Chan
WHO Director-General